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University of Dayton

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NEWS RELEASE

WHEN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THINK OF VIRTUOUS LEADERS, THEY THINK OF PEOPLE IN THEIR OWN LIVES, ESSAY CONTEST ENTRIES REVEAL

DAYTON, Ohio — They wrote about historical figures, athletes and public officials, but young people are most inspired by members of their own family.

Three out of the four winning entries in this year's University of Dayton Leadership with Virtue essay contest spotlighted family members. Robin Jacobson, a sophomore at Northmont High School, won first place for her moving tribute about her grandmother, Renate Frydman, a Holocaust survivor. The contest attracted a record 233 entries, and judges found most of the entries to be "very heartfelt," according to Laura Elizabeth, instructor of English at the University of Dayton who coordinated the judging.

"For me, with all this chaos going on now in the world, it's been comforting to think back over these essays. By and large, the students really described their immediate experiences with the kind of care and giving we're seeing right now with firefighters and volunteers (in the aftermath of terrorist attacks on the U.S.). They are impressed with the people around them, more than celebrities or abstract heroes from the past. Their family members have gone above and beyond even their own expectations."

Not all the best essays featured family members. "Some of the essays were about principals, educators and local leaders. Students really have a lot of respect for their teachers and principals," Elizabeth said. "We had a lot of essays about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and some about athletes, historical figures and public officials. One of the better essays was about Greg Maddux (Atlanta Braves pitcher) and his leadership on the field as well as in the community. But even the student who wrote about Greg Maddux told about how he wanted to grow up to be the kind of family man he is."

Jacobson received \$500 for her winning essay and the opportunity to have dinner with John Glenn, the recipient of this year's Leadership with Virtue Award from the University of Dayton and its National Alumni Association. Victoria Livingston, a freshman at Oakwood High School, won second place and \$250 for her essay about Martin Luther King Jr. Two

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students tied for third place. Lori Hess, a junior at Franklin Monroe High School and Amar Oza, a freshman at Oakwood High School, each received \$100. Hess wrote about her grandmother, who “hasn’t done anything spectacular that would interest the public eye, but she has managed to live her life to the fullest” and taught her “how to be the best I can be.” Oza wrote about his father, an Indian immigrant who arrived in New York with \$6 in his pocket and a dream to become a physician.

Jacobson in her winning entry described her grandmother as a dynamic, passionate and unforgettable hero. Renate Frydman runs the Dayton Holocaust Resource Center and is a special writer for the *Dayton Daily News*. To Jacobson, she’s also the first to bring over “her special chicken noodle soup” when she’s sick and the loudest cheerleader at school talent shows, soccer games and award ceremonies.

“My grandmother is a Holocaust survivor, and she has dedicated her life to educating others about this awful time period and how it affected millions of families like my own,” wrote Jacobson, 15. “Now many years later, she travels from place to place, speaking to everyone she can, from young children at schools to adults at conventions, sharing with them the horrors she and her family were forced to endure. Her story never fails to captivate the audience, their hearts touched like never before. She sparks a change that starts with one person and continues as that person then influences others to help spread the message.”

When language arts teacher Tom Andrassy encouraged Jacobson to enter the contest, she thought immediately of her grandmother. “She doesn’t get paid for what she does, she doesn’t do it to be a hero, she does it to help people,” Jacobson explained.

Although Jacobson has written poetry published by the Library of Congress, she said she never expected to win the contest. Her mother burst into tears when she heard the news.

Jacobson believes the world would be a better place if there were more people like her grandmother. “She challenges students to make a difference,” she wrote. “She compels us to accept and respect one another. She teaches others to carry with them at all times the luxury of freedom, the importance of family and the gift of love.”

To read the winning essays or for more information about University of Dayton Leadership with Virtue events, see www.udayton.edu/leadershipwithvirtue/.

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For media interviews, contact **Laura Elizabeth** at (937) 229-3423. **Robin Jacobson** can be reached at (937) 832-1648, and **Joanie Swedlund**, director of special programs at the University of Dayton, is available at (937) 229-3262. For a digital headshot of the winner, contact **Teri Rizvi** at (937) 229-3241.